

## CLAIMS

1. An isolated protein, consisting of a protein product of a gene which is structurally related to the *ced-3* and ICE genes, said isolated protein

5 having an alteration in the amino acid sequence of the product of a gene which is structurally related to the Ced-3 and ICE genes, said alteration corresponding to an alteration in the sequence of SEQ ID NO: 4 selected from the group consisting of:

- 10
- i) L to F at amino acid 26;
  - ii) G to R at amino acid 65;
  - iv) G to S at amino acid 287;
  - v) truncation of said protein after amino acid 323;
  - vi) truncation of said protein after amino acid 339;
  - vii) A to V at amino acid 361;
  - viii) E to K at amino acid 390; and
  - 15 ix) T to F at amino acid 393.

2. The protease of Claim 1 which cleaves after aspartate residues.

3. The protease of Claim 1 which is a cysteine protease.

4. An isolated ICE polypeptide (SEQ ID NO: 4) having an alteration which reduces the activity of the enzyme, wherein said alteration is selected from the

20 group consisting of:

- a) L to F at amino acid 26;

- b) G to R at amino acid 65;
- c) G to S at amino acid 287;
- d) truncation of said polypeptide after amino acid 323;
- e) truncation of said polypeptide after amino acid 339;
- 5 f) A to V at amino acid 361;
- g) E to K at amino acid 390; and
- h) T to F at amino acid 393.

5. A product of the gene of Claim 4 selected from RNA and protein.

10 6. A constitutively activated cell death protein comprising an amino acid sequence, said sequence comprising a portion of the Ced-3 protein shown in SEQ ID NO: 2 of Figure 6A, said portion selected from the group consisting of:

- a) the amino acids from approximately 150 to 503 (SEQ ID NO: 20);
- b) the amino acids from approximately 373 to 503 (SEQ ID NO: 21);
- and
- 15 c) the amino acids from approximately 150 to 372 (SEQ ID NO: 22).

20 7. The constitutively activated cell death protein of claim 6, further comprising a subportion of the region of Ced-3 from amino acids 1 to 149, as shown in SEQ ID NO: 2 of Figure 6A, said subportion enhancing the activity of the protein.

8. A constitutively activated cell death protein having an amino acid sequence ICE from the sequence shown in Figure 6A (SEQ ID NO: 4), said sequence selected from the group consisting of:

- a) the amino acids from approximately 111 to 404 (SEQ ID NO: 23);
- 5 b) the amino acids from approximately 298 to 404 (SEQ ID NO: 24);
- c) the amino acids from approximately 111 to 297 (SEQ ID NO: 25).

9. An isolated protein which is the NEDD-2 protein (SEQ ID NO: 26) having an alteration which inactivates the protein, wherein said alteration is A to V at amino acid 117.

10 10. The isolated protein of claim 9, wherein said alteration is C to A at amino acid 303.

11. The isolated protein of claim 9, wherein said alteration is C to S at amino acid 303.

12. Isolated protein which is selected from the group consisting of Ced-3 (SEQ ID NO: 2), ICE (SEQ ID NO: 4), and NEDD-2 (SEQ ID NO: 13), said protein having an alteration at a conserved amino acid corresponding to an amino acid of the Ced-3 protein (SEQ ID NO. 2) selected from the group consisting of:

- a) Ced-3 Ser 183 or ICE Ser 126;
- b) Ced-3 Met 234;
- 20 c) Ced-3 Arg 242;
- d) Ced-3 Leu 246 or ICE Leu 166;

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13. The isolated protein selected from the group consisting of Ced-3 (SEQ ID NO: 2) and ICE (SEQ ID NO: 4), said protein having an amino acid alteration in an amino acid corresponding to Cys 358 of Ced-3, and Cys 285 of ICE.

5 14. The isolated protein of claim 13, wherein said alteration is a Cys to Ala alteration.

15. The isolated protein of claim 13, wherein said protein is ICE and said alteration is at conserved amino acid 285 of said ICE.

16. The isolated protein of claim 13, wherein said protein is NEDD-2 and said alteration is at conserved amino acid 303 of said NEDD-2.

10 17. Isolated nucleic acid encoding the protein of Claim 12.

18. A method of preventing cell death, said method comprising administering a polypeptide of claim 12.

19. The method of claim 14, wherein said administering is to a patient and said polypeptide is provided at a therapeutically effective dose.

15 20. A method of preventing cell death, said method comprising administering a therapeutically effective amount of the isolated nucleic acid of claim 17.